

VI.—*Note on an Inscription at Bamyán. By Mr. C. MASSON.*

[Read at the Meeting of the 6th April.]

Of the antiquities of Central Asia, the Idols at Bamyán have long been known and celebrated in Europe. To ascertain their character is still a desideratum. An inscription found in so fortunate a situation, as at the summit of the niche in which stands the larger, and by inference, the more ancient of the idols directly over its head, will, if capable of being interpreted, dispel much of the mystery attaching to it and its associates. It contains but six characters as here exhibited*, appears to be entire, and although the copy of it was taken four years since, I think its fidelity may be depended upon.

When in possession of Mr. PRINSEP'S plates of the Pehlevi Alphabets, this inscription was compared with them, and its characters appeared to me to approach nearest to those of the Pehlevi of Sassanian coins from MARS DEN. Observing the apparent recurrence of the two first letters, and concluding that the alternated characters must be consonants and vowels, of the latter of which A was the more likely to be used as the more common, I sought its equivalent in the Pehlevi alphabet noted, and found it might be expressed by 𐎠. Marking also the number of the characters of the inscription, in union with the duplication seemingly of A or U, the word NANAIA occurred to my imagination, and attempting to write it in the Pehlevi of the alphabet, I produced

𐎠𐎠𐎠𐎠𐎠𐎠

The first five letters were so similar to those of the inscription, that I judged I might without imputation of temerity bring the circumstance to notice; and as for the final letter, if we are pretty sure of all the preceding ones, we may reasonably be satisfied with that also. The à of the alphabet, or 𐎠 has indeed a ?, or doubt, attached to it, while the final letter of the inscription resembles the A or à of other alphabets.

The idols of Bamyán, perhaps less ancient than many of the caves or temples there, have not an antiquity beyond the reach of verification, and while we pause whether or not to ascribe them to the princes we call Indo-Scythic, we dare affirm that they were constructed during the period of the Sassanian sway in Persia, or 220 A. D., and the era of Muhammedanism.

Kábul, 1836.

C. MASSON.

* See Plate VI. fig. 1; we confess the similitude of the marks, which Mr. MASSON takes for letters, to the Pehlevi alphabet is but just sufficient to hazard a conjecture upon. *Nanaia*, a female, would not be applicable to a male figure:—*Nanao* or *Nanano* (lunus) would be more consonant with the Pehlevi, and even with the form of the supposed letters.—ED.